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LIVES OF BRITISH PHYSICIANS.*

Physicians are like poets in one respect, they cannot be *mediocres*; they must be, or they must at least appear to the world to be, first-rate; otherwise they are nothing, they cannot live—by their profession. The divine, though he grumbles most, is least of all subject to the caprice, though he may be to the inequalities of fortune. The lawyer gets a fair trial of his talents, and his success is generally proportioned to his ability—but the physician is almost literally the mere plaything of fortune; his reputation is the result of one knows not what; he must know how to swim before he is allowed to enter the bath; his merits are decided on before they are put to the test; he owes his first fee to a false estimate of his proficiency; he is not judged by the result of his practice—at least, not fairly judged—for the multitude cannot form an opinion in a matter of such nice discrimination as the work in which a physician is engaged; he owes his introduction into practice, more to external advantages, than to his intrinsic excellence; he must have certain symptoms about him of gravity, age, disinterestedness, or disregard of money, together with a certain stock of assurance; and in fine, he must be more an actor than any other professional man; he must be patronised by influential persons in society; but above all—what came over us to forget it so long?—he must be fortunate; he must be fortunate in the first, and the second, and the third degree. Good fortune is as necessary an adjunct to his character, as it was deemed for a great commander among the ancient Romans. A physician, in one word, must be a lucky man before he gets into luck—or into good practice, which is one and the same thing.

It is commonly thought that in the medical profession, success is proverbially slow. If it be proverbial, it is one of those proverbs that are more trite than true. In the life of Parry—Captain Parry's father—in the present collection, we have some data to go upon. The following extract will show at what a rate of progression, (geometrical, is it not?) a physician's fees will proceed—once he succeeds in getting practice; it should be observed that the register begins to be kept in the doctor's twenty-fifth year—and Caleb Hillier Parry entered on his medical career at that age, with singular advantages of birth, family connection, education, and patronage. We do not exactly coincide with the writer in one or two of his remarks; but the extract is valuable, and we give it entire.

"The daily list of his patients, kept from the year 1780 to Oct. 25, 1816, the day which, by a paralytic seizure, terminated his career of public service, accurately records the opinion which was entertained of his merits, and the extent of his professional emoluments. It appears that during this period nearly the whole catalogue of British nobility and many of the most distinguished men in the kingdom visited Bath for his advice, and, in their preserved correspondence testify the benefits which they had received from his skill and attention. It may not be altogether without interest and benefit to the junior members of the profession, to lay before them the progressive increase which appears to have taken place in Dr. Parry's pecuniary profits. By exhibiting the effects of perseverance and knowledge, in connexion with a steady attention to those higher objects, the inquiry after truth, and an unwearied performance of all the duties of charity, such a view may preserve many from unwarrantable expectation, and encourage others under a despondence arising from the inevitable delays and difficulties incident to their professional entrance upon the world."

* Family Library, vol. XIV.—London, Murray.

"The receipts of Dr. Parry's first year, 1780, were 39*l.* 19*s.*; of his second, 1781, 70*l.* 7*s.*; of 1782, 112*l.* 7*s.*; of 1783, 162*l.* 5*s.*; 1784, 239*l.* 5*s.*; of 1785, 443*l.* 10*s.*; of 1786, 552*l.* 9*s.*; of 1787, 755*l.* 6*s.*; of 1788, 1533*l.* 15*s.* From the tenth year of his practice, the amount rapidly increased, and appears to have varied from 300*l.* to above 600*l.* per month. Of one day, the receipts for separate attendances were fifty guineas."

Doctor Parry was a fortunate man; so much so indeed, that we, captivated like the rest of the world with him whom fortune favours, feel highly gratified with the perusal of the sketch of him in this popular biography. We cannot refrain from extracting the latter portion of it at length.

"It has been truly said, that for many years, Dr. Parry was more allied to the public by the variety of his other accomplishments and pursuits, than by those of his immediate profession. It would not be easy to adduce an instance of higher endowments, whether we look for the resources and refinements of ordinary society, or the more profound attainments of intellectual and cultivated life. His intimate acquaintance with the arts of music, poetry, and painting, and his enthusiasm with regard to each of these subjects, are well remembered by those who knew him. From their cultivation he derived solace and amusement after many a weary day of toil and anxiety.

"In all subjects of natural history he was particularly interested, and had made extensive collections of minerals, rocks, and organic remains. Whilst the sciences to which these related were yet in their infancy, he had amassed materials which would have grown into volumes, and have supplied important records in the history of these favourite departments of inquiry. In 1781 he published "*Proposals for a History of the Fossils of Gloucestershire*," the introduction to which was intended to include all that was known on the subject of organic remains, and the result of many experiments and observations in which he had been long and ardently engaged. His increasing avocations suspended, and finally prevented, the completion of this work; but his remaining MSS. are a sufficient proof of his industry, knowledge, and discrimination.

"Dr. Parry was an indefatigable reader. Besides a continued attention to more severe subjects, he had an intense pleasure in the perusal of works relating to history, voyages, and travels. Of the latter, particularly, there was scarcely a published volume with which he was not familiar. With the classical poets and ancient dramatists of England he was thoroughly conversant. Amongst his last writings was an *Essay on the Character of Hamlet*, which, even in the midst of an afflicting illness, he dictated to his daughters.

"His accurate acquaintance with the history and relations of his own and other countries had rendered him the esteemed friend and correspondent of Burke and of Windham. Letters, addressed to the latter, on the internal defence of Great Britain at the time of a threatened invasion, and on the recommendation of spearmen or lancers, and light artillery, are still in existence. His insight into our commercial relations is evinced by a series of letters which point out the importance of our South American trade, particularly that of the colonies of Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice; and which, in 1796, were published in the "*Sun*," under the signature "*Nereus*." As a metaphysician, few individuals possessed a clearer head, or a more profound judgment. Many MSS. remain which exhibit his own originality, his admiration of Locke, and the low esteem in which he generally held the philosophy of the Scotch school.

"Dr. Parry's correspondence was very extensive, as well on the subject of medicine, as of agriculture, gardening, and other topics. Many admirable letters, addressed to two of his sons, who were spending three or four years on the Continent, and to his youngest son, in the navy, indicate his paternal care and affection, and the value of his precepts and advice.

"In person Dr. Parry was remarkably handsome. With much dignity of manner he united a certain playfulness, which, while through life it had invigorated and charmed his domestic circle, scarcely deserted him under the severest trials and amidst the heaviest afflictions. His miscellaneous reading, extensive knowledge of men and manners, and an excellent memory, supplied, in his intercourse with society, a constant fund of amusing anecdote and of appropriate allusion. From an intimate acquaintance with many celebrated military and naval characters, he had

become remarkably conversant with the details and adventures of their profession; and scarcely a battle had occurred during the preceding century, with the minute circumstances of which he was not acquainted. In the "Athenæum," (vol. v.) for April, 1809, is a letter, which states the claims of his friend, Lord Rodney, to the invention of breaking the line. During a severe illness, of nearly six years' duration, he amused himself with dictating anecdotes of many distinguished friends and contemporaries, which might well deserve a place in a more extended memoir.

"Dr. Parry was an early member of the Bath and West of England Society of agriculture, arts, manufactures, and commerce (1780). As a member of its committees, as a contributor to its volumes, and be a successful candidate for its premiums, he was, for many years, one of its principal supporters. In 1797, he was elected a vice-president, and in 1817 was honoured with the gold Bedford medal, as a mark of esteem and gratitude for many past services. In 1782 he was chosen a governor of the Bath General Hospital: in 1800, elected a fellow of the Royal Society: in 1801, a member of the Society of Natural History at Göttingen, (Physische Gesellschaft:) in 1808, an honorary member of the Farming Society of Ireland: and in 1814, a vice-president of the Merino Society of London.

"Dr. Parry had four sons and five daughters; of the former, the illustrious navigator, Captain Sir William Edward Parry, R. N., is the youngest.

"Dr. Parry died at his house in Sion Place, Bath, on the 9th of March, 1822, having removed thither from his usual residence, the Circus, in April, 1817. On the 25th of October, 1816, he had been afflicted with a paralytic attack, which deprived him of the use of his right side; and during the remainder of his life, a period of nearly six years, rendered his speech imperfect, and almost unintelligible. Though his existence was become a state of complicated bodily disease and suffering, his mental activity never deserted him. He occupied himself in reading during many hours of the day, and marked every interesting passage that occurred to him. From these he caused the most valuable parts to be transcribed by his daughters, and in this manner formed several volumes of useful and miscellaneous information. His professional life being ended, his chief occupation and amusement now consisted in his farm and in his gardens—the entire direction and management of which he undertook. Under these circumstances, he dictated the collection of anecdotes and reminiscences to which allusion has above been made; and on the arrival of his son, Captain Parry, from his first expedition to Melville Island, he revised the whole of his *First Journal*, previously to its being submitted to publication.

"It has been truly said, that 'Dr. Parry was a sincere believer in Christianity, an excellent husband, father, and friend, devoted to his king, and firmly attached to the constitution of his country.'

"No one in his sphere died more regretted. Many of his friends, and a very numerous assemblage of his professional brethren, at their own request attended his venerated remains to their grave in the abbey."

When Johnson said, that, "a very curious book," might be written about physicians, and their lives and fortunes, he hardly could have meant that such a book, though very curious, would be very suitable for the drawing-room, or the family fireside; not that there is any thing in medical biography more unsuited to general readers, than in the biography of lawyers or divines—on the contrary, what can be more interesting to the social circle, than to become acquainted with the circumstances of the early career and progress of their medical friends—friends in the strictest sense of the word? Neither of the other learned professions in fact can boast the same degree of intimacy with their respective dependants. Physicians are by virtue of their office *des plus intimes—les amis de la maison*. The priest of the parish has his walk in society well defined—the lawyer has his still better—but *the doctor* is blended and mixed in the ordinary occurrences of society; he is part and parcel of the domestic group. To a certain extent therefore, medical biography is calculated to be a popular subject, but there is much connected with the lives of physicians, which cannot, though indispensable, become "familiar in our mouths as household words." To the scientific, and to physicians themselves, a popular book of biographical memoirs confined

to their profession, were a thing of small account. To be useful and interesting to *them*, certain details historical and descriptive would be required, totally unsuited to the eyes of common readers.

The present little volume belonging to the *Family* library, is the first attempt ever made to treat medical biography in a popular way; and we think it will be found a generally interesting book. Some of the early lives are indeed meagre, and most of them unscrupulously drawn from all sources; but too frequently without acknowledgement, which we like not; but there is one life, the last, that of Dr. Gooch, which we think renders the whole production attractive: the style in which it is executed, fully redeems the character of the author as capable of treating the difficult task of biography with originality and vigor. We shall make no apology for extracting liberally from this portion of the volume; the extracts speak for themselves, and require no comment.

"Robert Gooch was born at Yarmouth, in Norfolk, in June, 1784. His father was, early in life, a master in the Royal Navy, and afterwards commanded a vessel in the merchant service. The circumstances of his parents were not such as to enable them to give their son the advantages of a classical education: he was sent as a day scholar to a school kept by a Mr. Nicholls, where he was taught writing and arithmetic. As a boy he was active and brave, though not strong; his disposition was affectionate, and he was much beloved by his early associates; some of his school-boy intimacies continued to the time of his death. He was not remarkable for early proficiency: neither quickness of apprehension, nor retentiveness of memory seemed to distinguish him from ordinary boys. When about fifteen years of age he was apprenticed to Mr. Borrett, a surgeon and apothecary at Yarmouth. At this time he began the study of Latin, and with little or no assistance from others taught himself to read that language with tolerable facility.

"Among some loose papers of his, on the subject of dreams, occurs the following passage, which gives so lively an image of this period of his life, that it must not be omitted.

"From the age of fifteen to twenty-one I was an apprentice to a country surgeon, and when I had nothing else to do, no pills to roll, nor mixtures to compose, I used, by the advice of my master, to go up into my bed-room, and there, with Cheselden before me, learn the anatomy of the bones by the aid of some loose ones, together with a whole articulated skeleton, which hung up in a box at the foot of my bed. It was sometime before I overcame the awe with which I used to approach this formidable personage. At first, even by daylight, I liked to have some one in the room during my interviews with him; and at night, when I laid down in my bed and beheld the painted door which inclosed him, I was often obliged to make an effort to think of something else. One summer night, at my usual hour of retiring to rest, I went up to my bed-room, it was in the attic story, and overlooked the sea, not a quarter of a mile off. It was a bright moonlight night, the air was sultry; and after undressing I stood for some time at my window, looking out on the moonlight sea, and watching a white sail which now and then passed. I shall never have such another bed-room, so high up, so airy, and commanding such a prospect; or, probably, even if I had, it would never again look so beautiful, for then was the spring-time of my life, when the gloss of novelty was fresh on all the objects which surrounded me, and I looked with unmingled hope upon the distant world. Now—but I am rambling from my story. I went to bed, the moonlight which fell bright into my room showed me distinctly the panelled door behind which hung my silent acquaintance; I could not help thinking of him—I tried to think of something else, but in vain. I shut my eyes, and began to forget myself, when, whether I was awake or asleep, or between both, I cannot tell; but suddenly I felt two bony hands grasp my ankles, and pull me down the bed; if it had been real, it could not have been more distinct. For some time, how long I cannot tell, I almost fainted with terror, but when I came to myself, I began to observe how I was placed: if what I had felt had been a reality, I must have been pulled half-way out of the bed, but I found myself lying with my head on my pillow, and my body in the same place and attitude as when I shut my eyes to go to sleep. At this moment this is the only proof which I have that it was not a reality, but a dream.

"It was at the commencement of the year 1808 that Gooch first appeared in the

character of a critic. Several of his friends agreed to establish a new medical journal, and he became one of the principal contributors to the *London Medical Review*—which existed for about five years, and contained many articles of very considerable merit. The great error of all young reviewers is the abuse of assumed power; it is gratifying to self-esteem to point out defects, and the youthful critic is more anxious to discover faults than excellencies. Gooch used often at a later period of his life to regret the severity in which he had indulged in some of his early essays in this department. His first article was on the subject of insanity; the book reviewed a translation of Pinel. By a singular coincidence the first and the last of his literary labors were on the same subject. There is a paragraph in this review which is so applicable to Gooch's own peculiar conformation of mind that he must have had an eye to himself when he wrote it. 'There are some characters,' he says, 'who are commonly called low-spirited, gloomy, desponding fellows. During an interval of occupation, when the mind is free to range where it pleases, they are constantly painting their future lives with a pencil dipped in black. Aware that they possess certain resources of money, knowledge, and patronage, they view their present situation in the same light with the most cheerful of their companions. But the character of the man, the extent of his resources, and the usual conduct of the world being given, to find his future lot, he commences his calculations with the same assumptions, and differs from them in the conclusion. They deduce success, he misfortune; and the consequence is, that he becomes a frequent prey to those sorrowful apprehensions and gloomy emotions which want only strength and permanency to constitute one species of mental disease.'

"In 1820 he lost his eldest son, an interesting and promising child of five years old: no calamity which he had ever experienced affected him so deeply as the death of this boy. In a letter, written soon after this event, he says: 'There is only one subject I can talk to you about, and that is my boy; he is always in our thoughts. Southey, in 'Roderick,' gives the recipe for grief with a truth which shows he has tried it, and found its efficacy—religion and strenuous exertion. Whoever says that the latter is the chief, says false; for the former affords support when the mind is incapable of exertion; it tranquilizes in moments which exertion cannot reach, and is not only not the least, but the best of the two. When we went down to Croydon to deposit our dear boy in my little tenement there, you will easily believe that I approached the town and entered the church-yard with strange feelings: ten years back I had visited this spot to lay a wife and a child in the same tomb; since then I had recovered from my grief, had formed new affections, had had them wounded as bitterly as the former, and was now approaching the same spot again on a similar, and as poignant an occasion. The scene was singularly instructive; it cried out with a voice, which I heard to my centre, of the endurance and curability of grief—of the insecurity of every thing—the transience of life—the rapid and inevitable current with which we are all hurrying on; and it asked me, how I could fear to submit to that state into which so many whom I had dearly loved had already passed before me? You will be interested to know the state of the contents of the tomb after the lapse of so many years; both the coffins looked as if they had been deposited yesterday, as clean, as dry, as firm: if they could have been opened, I have little doubt the bodies would have been found in proper form, though changed. I added my beloved boy to its former inhabitants, and then asked myself, who goes next.'

"Gooch had now been for a considerable part of his life engaged in attending more particularly to the diseases of women, and he was not a man upon whom the lessons of experience were lost. The publication of his work on this subject was, therefore, sure to add to his reputation. He corrected the last sheets of this volume while at Brighton, in the summer of 1829; and he lived long enough to know that he had not disappointed the high expectations of his medical friends. On his return to town he found that his book had been praised by every professional reader, and that he could have increased his practice to any extent had his health permitted. But his strength was unequal to the former demands upon it. His bodily powers failed gradually and progressively, but his mind retained its activity almost to the last. He became a living skeleton, and so helpless that he was fed like an infant, yet he would dictate with a faltering voice sentences which indicated no mental feebleness. Once or twice he became delirious for a few minutes, and the consciousness that he was so distressed him greatly. His life was prolonged for some days by the constant watching of his medical friends, Mr. George Young and Mr.

Fernandez, who relieved each other at his bedside; and by the admirable nursing of his wife, whose health suffered materially by her incessant attentions.

"On the 16th of February, 1830, he breathed his last. Enough has been stated in this brief memoir, to show that Robert Gooch was no ordinary man. During a short life, embittered by almost constant illness, he succeeded in attaining to great eminence in his profession, and left behind him valuable contributions to medical knowledge. His Essay on the Plague settled the question of the contagious nature of that disease, at least for the present generation; and, when the same controversy shall be again revived (for medical as well as theological heresies spring up again after the lapse of a few generations), will furnish facts and arguments for the confutation of future ancient contagionists. The paper on Anatomy in the *Quarterly Review* for January, 1830, which bears internal marks of being his, and must, of course, have been dictated from his death-bed, has placed the question in a right point of view, by proving that it is the interest of the public rather than of the medical profession that the impediments to study of that science should be removed. His book *On the Diseases peculiar to Women* is the most valuable work on that subject in any language; the chapters on puerperal fever and puerperal madness are probably the most important additions to practical medicine of the present age.

"With regard to personal appearance, Gooch was rather below the ordinary height, and always thin; his countenance was elegantly marked; the dark full eyes remarkably fine; the habitual expression made up of sagacity and melancholy, though no features could exhibit occasionally a more happy play of humour. His manners were singularly well adapted to a sick room—natural, quiet, impressive; and the kindness of his heart led him to sympathize readily with the feelings of others, and rarely failed to attach his patients strongly. They who were accustomed to rely upon him merely for professional aid, will find it difficult to supply his place; to his intimates and his family his loss is irreparable. Doctor Gooch has left three children—two boys and a girl; his family will be moderately provided for, and his sons will inherit the inestimable advantage of their father's good name and example."

That "Radcliffe" should occupy by far the largest space in the volume is, we suppose, to be imputed only to the writer's intention of making his book popular; or as we rather suspect, it is owing to the comparatively abundant materials which remain to us of that able physician's life. As a discoverer of any improvement in his art, or as an accomplished scholar, the doctor has no pretensions to our notice. His fame rests chiefly on his strong good sense and his natural sagacity, his coarse wit, and his munificence. The leading feature of his life, as it appears in the present collection, is his wit and humour, and numerous anecdotes are given of him, but so refined, and pruned, and castigated, that they are but too often destitute of the force they should otherwise have possessed. Thus the story of his first matrimonial cruise is much impaired—though in justice we should say not so much as many other of the anecdotes—the urinoscopic one for instance. The doctor, however, it should be added, was a great favourite with the ladies, and not always the injured person. Among others, he attracted the notice of a lady of quality, whose individuality is now lost under the name of Lady Betty. She continued to be out of order week after week, and at last fairly exhausted the patience of the doctor at being sent for on so many trifling occasions. Whereupon he told her father that it was his opinion that her ladyship stood more in need of a confessor than a physician, for he was convinced her mind was more distempered than her body. But it was in vain that the doctor was dull, and avoided his patient—he was at last informed by the lady's maid that he alone must be that confessor. Hereupon he gave his attendance to hear what she had to say, which made a discovery that filled him with amazement. How to answer her directly he knew not, for she had made a sort of ambiguous confession which only pointed out her great regard for a certain person without any name; he thereupon told her

'that the case was somewhat difficult, but he did not doubt to ease her of all her anxieties in a month's time.' Accordingly, the young lady formed an inconceivable joy to herself; but the doctor immediately laid the whole affair before Lord ———, her father, with a caution to him not to let the daughter know he was any way apprised of it, since it was in his power to prevent her flinging herself away with a man much beneath her, by a speedy contract of marriage with some person of equal extraction. This advice was readily embraced and gratefully acknowledged, and the lady, who is now living, and one of the best of wives, was married to a nobleman who had made pretensions to her for several months before this discovery, within the time limited, which at once absolved the doctor from his promise, and shewed his inviolable attachment to the reputation and interest of his friend and benefactor.* The inexorable doctor was made to suffer in his turn not long after. In a visit to a young female patient of great beauty, wealth and rank, he was so smitten with her charms, as to be much in need of a physician himself. He altered his liveries, ordered a new coach, and disclosed his love. The ungrateful girl ridiculed his attachment, and made a capital good joke of it for Sir Richard Steele. The consequence was, that poor Radcliffe cut a laughable figure in No. 44 of the Tatler.

We did intend to notice some passages in Sydenham's life, but want of space obliges us to desist. Sydenham is well known as the great founder of modern medicine. His treatment of small-pox—which has perhaps never since been improved—would of itself be sufficient to render him famous to late posterity; and his observations on the plague may be mentioned as eminently valuable. It is curious how interesting a theme the plague has ever been both to poets and historians. To Thucydides probably this may be owing, whose account of the plague of Athens is perhaps the most perfect piece of composition that ever came from the pen of man. Nothing in his account is wanting to satisfy the physician, the historian, the poet and the moralist—the inimitable writer has selected his details with such judgment, has narrated them with such spirit, has supplied such genuine touches of truth and pathos, as to give, in a few chapters, such pictures to the imagination, such information to the understanding, as the elaborate volumes of others are unable to convey.

We have only to add, that the author of the little volume which we have just been noticing is understood to be Dr. Macmichael, who is well known as the author of the Gold-headed Cane.†

* *Memoirs of the life of John Radcliffe, M. D. interspersed with original letters, &c.* 1715.

† A rumour is afloat in the literary circles that the life of Gooch has been written by Southey.